

# Wellspring

October – November 2006 Isaiah 58.6

*All things are possible with God*

[A publication of Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc.]



## Sin/Sinner, What's the Difference?

By Bob Van Domelen

<sup>2</sup>But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15.2)

<sup>7</sup>All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" (Luke 19.7)

Would it have surprised you to know that the article for the August edition of this newsletter was to have the above title? But somewhere between thought and finger action on the keyboard, "WWJD" popped out and that was that.

A few weeks ago I attended a series of talks on how ministers might better understand the whole issue of homosexuality. The event, co-sponsored by *Focus on the Family* and the Family Research Institute of Wisconsin, drew approximately 200 pastors or church representatives.

At one point the following comment was made, "Avoid the phrase 'Hate the sin, love the sinner' because regardless of the intention, the sinner often identifies with the sin and is incapable of separating the hate." Almost immediately I thought of the title that had been set aside.

The phrase "Hate the sin, love the sinner" has been around for a long time, and I always wanted to take it as it was meant. After all, I could do wrong and people would still love me.

One of the problems I have, however, fits like a glove with the presenter's remarks. Years ago, I was often involved in homosexual behaviors and to be honest, I did not hate the sin behavior itself as much as I hated the internal conflict that always followed. In other words, it was a case of the body and the mind at war.

Paul stated it this way: <sup>15</sup>*For that which I do, I know not. For what I would do, that do I not; but what I hate, that I do.* (Romans 7.15) When I thought about my life and finally got a handle on what he was saying, I said, "Yup, that's me."

I suppose that had I bought into the "born gay" thinking, I would be saying Paul was speaking about some other sin. But I couldn't do it. I knew that what I felt was one thing but what I did was another.

Twenty one years ago, the acting out part of my same-gender attractions was set aside. As for the attractions themselves, let's say that they come and they go. The good thing is that they no longer consume me; they no longer force my decisions.

"Hate the sin, love the sinner." In the past, I lived with the notion that my behaviors defined me, and once the definition was made, the behaviors came much more easily. I believe that sexually acting out with someone of the same gender is clearly not in God's plan for me and I call such

behavior sin. Others might argue that point, but I don't ask them to live my life for me, anymore, I suppose, than they would want me to live their lives for them. At the same time, I won't make excuses for my beliefs and if others ask how I feel about same-sex behavior, I will tell them.

**"This man welcomes sinners"**

**"He has gone to be a guest of a sinner"**

If you think about it for a moment, doesn't the statement beg the question "How does one get to be a non-sinner?" The Pharisees would have had no way of knowing whether those sharing a meal with Jesus committed a fresh sin that very day, so I am guessing the Pharisees were actually saying, "Those people did wrong in the past and we know about it."

But there is a second argument implied in what the Pharisees said. There was/is no hope for a sinner—sinners are to be shunned. No exceptions. The Pharisee in Luke 18.11 said, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men" and you know something? There are a lot of people who react the same way when they learn someone is gay.

In a perfect world, we would all recognize ourselves as sinners—especially when we compare ourselves to the perfection of God. Maybe what I am suggesting is that sin can be defined as anything not God-like or not having the characteristics of God.

But in my human way of thinking, that bothers me a lot because as a boy I was taught that the object of daily living is the avoidance of sin and doing good things for others. The definition of sin I just shared makes it sound like just about everything I do now is sin, so what hope is there? More to the modern person's thinking, what a bleak existence!

But it isn't. It's anything but. What I am suggesting, however, is that most people have at least one behavior (thought or action) that would be called sin; most people do not give much thought to lesser behaviors that don't cause them anxiety; and people have the capacity to redefine a negative behavior as acceptable if the end result of the behavior is considered desirable.

We all sin so why do we have a hard time accepting that fact? Here's my guess—and it will only be a guess. The Pharisees actually answered the question for me because they defined people who sinned as bad; bad people are to be shunned. We shake our heads in disgust at the attitude of the Pharisees but it really is how many people think.

Proof of this attitude in modern times is to compare the word sinner with any convicted felon, for it is the convicted

felon whose sins have been made public, whose behavior has been chastised, and whose future is in question.

Finally, I would offer a simple statement: Sinners are often really nice people, talented people, and well-intentioned people—at least for the most part. Why are we supposed to think otherwise?

The problem with simplifying things like this is that we are prone to dismiss the sin *because* we see a person as a good person. It is, after all, bad people who sin. The Pharisees told us that.

I am inclined to believe that the journey of one who sees a sin behavior as something to be overcome recognizes *both* sin and the personal capacity to sin. For the one who also believes in God, in the power of Christ's death on the cross, and in the reality of the Holy Spirit, life is filled with great joy.

<sup>22</sup> *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.* <sup>23</sup> *They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* <sup>24</sup> *I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."* (Lamentations 3.22.24)

Hate the sin, love the sinner? The words provoke the potential for a healthy response to negative behavior, but I would agree with the speaker at the pastoral conference. The words are fluff, the sentiment filled with the potential for self-righteousness. And one has to wonder whether or not anything really changes when they are spoken.

Jesus told the woman caught in adultery, "Go and sin no more." Don't you sometimes wonder if she succeeded?

## Wisconsin Ministry Locations

### Broken Yoke

P.O. Box 361  
Waukesha, WI 53187-0361  
262-896-0841 (answering machine)  
Bob@brokenyoke.org

### Meetings:

**Support Group** (weekly)  
Tuesday, 7:00PM

### Website:

<http://www.brokenyoke.org>

### Newsletter:

**Wellspring** (published bimonthly)

*Note: This newsletter and some back issues are available in pdf format on our website. If you don't have Adobe Acrobat Reader, there are links that allow you to download that program free.*

### Redeemed Ministries

A support system for women  
Support Group (bi-weekly)  
2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, 7:00PM  
Call 414-607-1935 for info

### Reclamation Resources

P.O. Box 1062  
Oshkosh, WI 54902  
920-303-1041  
<http://www.reclamationrc.org>



## Our Prayer Corner

*Because we care about one another, we pray . . .*

- For all those who are planning to attend the Exodus Regional conference (October 13-15), that they be blessed in this time of preparing and that the time at the conference be a blessing beyond measure.
- For all those ministry leaders in the Minneapolis area who are in charge of planning the conference, that all details will be taken to the Lord.
- For Tom and Donna Cole, our conference keynote speakers, that they will allow God full access to their hearts and voices.
- For the successful completion of the ministry's new web site, that the learning curve needed to bring about the changes will not be too great.
- For the board of directors of Broken Yoke Ministries, that wisdom and discernment will be theirs as we discuss the future of this ministry.
- For the nomination of John Groff to be voted in as a board member of this ministry, that his nomination will be a strengthening of the board.
- For groups like Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays, that their presence will be recognized as a much needed balance to those who only support a pro-gay position.
- For the women who attend Redeemed, our women's support group, that they find encouragement, hope, and useful tools in dealing with issues.
- For Bob, that his daily walk reflects God's loving and healing strength in his ministry and in his personal life.
- For Broken Yoke Ministries, that its financial needs will be met through the generosity and prayer support of the readers of this newsletter.
- Finally, for all who feel they have no choice but to live as gay or lesbian, that they wake each morning seeking to serve the Lord in all things. God will move all of us into His loving arms if we surrender our wills to Him.

**Broken Yoke Ministries is a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) corporation and operates solely on the contributions of people such as you. All donations to this ministry are tax deductible and will be recognized. While there is no charge for this newsletter, it can only be published if there are funds available to make that possible. Send your donations to:**

**Broken Yoke Ministries, Inc**

**PO Box 361**

**Waukesha, WI 53187-0361**

**PS A substantial number of our readers are incarcerated and unable to offer financial support. Please consider a donation on their behalf.**



When things look bleak, when hope seems out of the question, remember

*All things are possible with God!*

# WIJD

Recently, I received a letter from a pastor friend of mine. I don't hear from him often, but when he writes, I always pay close attention. His comments on "WWJD" (August) are, I think, a very important next step for all who believe, and I share them with you here in the hope that they will bless you and provoke an even deeper relationship with the Lord.

Dear Bob,

What sparked my reason for writing this note was the title of your latest Wellspring article, "WWJD." Lately that question, "What would Jesus do," has intrigued me. It is an excellent question and you used it very well in your article. It tied together the difficult things that you have noticed. For me it underscores one of the reasons that we so desperately need Jesus. It is because there really is so little in life that is black and white. Even "black and white" pictures are all about shades of grey.

To envision a picture or even a world just visually that is truly and absolutely black and white is a vision that I find rather unsettling. All of the details would be lost. But it is the greyness of life that makes it such a challenge as well. If it were black and white the Lord would simply say, "do as I say," and that would be it. Reward or punishment, it would be settled because everything was black and white. But sometimes life makes us choose between two wrongs and this is why we need Christ to save us. I say this to support and maybe add to the way you used WWJD in the article.

But that doesn't reflect my thoughts lately about WWJD. Lately I have come to think that an important question is WIJD, "What is Jesus doing?" My concern with WWJD, again, not reflected in your article, is that for many, Jesus is not present and active in life today, right now.

For many Jesus is a character of years ago, a character we read about in the Bible, a character we may even pray to, but to seriously wrestle with the thought of what Jesus is up to today, what Jesus is doing in the world and in my life today, is a foreign thought, or a thought that produces a lot of anxiety for people.

In a survey I did within my own congregation more than a year ago, where I interviewed about a dozen people I asked the WIJD question a number of different ways regarding their lives or what was going on in our congregation. Almost all of the people became clearly uneasy when the conversation went in that direction. And, granted, it was their pastor who was asking them this, and granted it is easier to point to a book and say, "This is what Jesus did," but I was a little taken aback by the difficulty active and involved members of the congregation had with thinking about what Jesus was up to in their lives and in the life of our congregation.

So I have been pushing the WIJD question a lot lately. It has led to another question I ask of myself and invite others to ask of themselves on a daily basis: "What does Jesus want to do through you today?" I think this question helps people to consider the activity of Jesus within their daily lives, that washing floors or going for a walk or time in prayer are all things that Jesus wants to do through us.

Jesus was and is completely human, and God created the wonder of life with all of its dynamics and Jesus wants to be thoroughly involved in it. Anyway, I share this, again, because it has been a focus of mine lately. □

## New Board Member

John Groff, Hales Corners, will be introduced to the BY Board of Directors at its November meeting as a candidate. A more complete introduction will be included in our December issue.

## A brief follow-up on "Sin/Sinner, What's the Difference?"

I don't normally have feelings such as I experienced after writing the main article for this issue, but this time I came away from the final sentence feeling that there were some important things shared but no clear answer that was obvious for me to the main question stated in the title.

As I mulled over everything, I think I came to a conclusion. This conclusion might not be the answer you had hoped to read, but it does make sense to me.

*The difference between sin and sinner is in the attitude of either the sinner or the one who is faced with the sins of others.* For the person who believes in the human capacity to sin repeatedly, I think the words "Lord, forgive me, a sinner" are honest, true, and spoken with humility. The words do not diminish the sinner's relationship with God; they emphasize it.

For the person who sees sin as a label that forever separates the sinner from participation in the community of believers, all serious sin becomes a wedge of unforgiveness.

I do understand that some sins create incredible pain for those sinned against, a pain that might cripple the one sinned against for life. Given such deep hurt, anger directed at the sinner is often approved of by those seeking to be compassionate to the one harmed.

In the end, however, the seeming peace that comes from separating the sinner because of the sin heals no one. Such anger or indignation serves only to affirm a self-righteous aloofness. And although such aloofness might be understandable, it definitely is not what Jesus would have taught—nor did He.

## New Web Site

The host for our current website decided to move on and that meant building a new web site. The address will still be the same

**[www.brokenyoke.org](http://www.brokenyoke.org)**

but the look and layout will be new. Given the fact that our changes had to be made by September 30, those of you who regularly visit our site might not find everything that was on the old site by the first week or so in October. As they say, "Pardon our construction dust."

The bottom line is we need your prayers in this venture and I hope to be able to count on them.